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YOUTH CONFERENCE X
INTERNATIONAL TRADE: POLICY AND ETHICS
November 14-15, 1997
Final Report

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University College of Cape Breton

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FINAL REPORT

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Summary of Activities

Some of the foreign trade policy issues which have raised ethical questions in recent media reports are of deep concern to young Canadians trying to form their political and national identities. These include the investment in and out-sourcing of labour to countries where human rights are abused and protective labour laws are marginal, the general loss of employment southward, and exports of products and technologies such as pesticides and nuclear reactors which are domestically regulated to countries where environmental regulations and review are weak. Conference participants spent two days considering some of these issues, and looking at ways to control abuses. If "We're not to blame, it's the system" is true, how do you change the system? Their suggestions for policy are included below.

After a welcome from a Coast Guard College Officer followed by an introduction of participants, Dr Brian Tennyson, Director of the CIS and history professor at the University College of Cape Breton, gave the history of local trading patterns and began to speak of ethics as applied to international trade. He was followed by Anthony Morris from the Mi'kmaq Justice Institute, who posed the question of ethics around twenty dollars worth of beads for Manhattan Island: who was deceiving whom, given the aboriginal belief that land cannot be owned.

Bob Thomson, from Fair TradeMark Canada, began the afternoon by encouraging everyone to look at labels and tell where their neighbour's clothing was made. Then, using overheads, he spoke about dependence on imported clothing and other goods, many of which are made by low-paid workers and even children, and asked how often we look at the "labour behind the label." He pointed out that Michael Jordan earns $20 million per year ($55,000/day) for endorsing Nike products which earn Indonesian workers $2.60 a day. At home, he pointed out, Northern Reflections clothing, owned by Woolworths, is made by women at home or in small contract shops who earn a average of $4.50/hour, or 65% of the Ontario minimum wage. He also explained the pros and cons of manufacturers' Codes of Conduct, noting that some consumer actions can cause more harm than good.

Bob explained that it is possible to monitor working conditions and to track products made under fair conditions using consumer labels. He described the two main characteristics of Codes of Conduct as 1) criteria or standards and 2) how standards are monitored and introduced Fair TradeMark Canada, the Canadian affiliate of Fairtrade Labelling Organization International, which monitors and certifies fairly traded coffee, tea, cocoa, sugar, honey and bananas. He concluded his presentation by defining the conditions of fair trade and fair trade monitoring.

The second morning began with the film, *Isle of Flowers*, giving a startling and thought-provoking fourteen minutes of human trade history. Coady International Institute students and staff presented Philippine, Dominican, and Kenyan perspectives. They spoke about the fishing industry in the Philippines, on being cut off from resources when land is bought up by foreign interests, and about the banana industry in Dominica and the impossibility of a level playing ground in the international market.

Results

Afternoon brainstorming, small group discussions and prioritizing through "dot-mocracy" (each participant has three dots to place in front of the suggestions s/he feels are most important) set options for Canadians to use to encourage fair trade. The following is a list of seventeen action suggestions they wish reported to the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development as the results of their discussion. These suggestions are passed on as policy options from a group of Cape Breton youth concerned about the effects of global trade practices on their lives and on the lives of their peers in other parts of the world.

Actions

Cape Breton Youth Conference Participants created an action list for Canadians to use to encourage fair trade. The top four suggestions were:

1. Educate the public concerning unethical labour practices in various companies.
2. Ask for fair-traded products when shopping.
3. Support Fair TradeMark labeling of products.
4. Peer Awareness. (Some excellent suggestions were made here such as "fair-trade fashion shows").

Some of the other suggestions that were made were:

- tell investors what's going on.
- pressure multi-nationals.
- start/support co-ops.
- encourage changes in advertising ethics.
- promote global minimum wage standard.
- list "good" companies on the www.
- ask governments to use fair traded products (eg. coffee in offices) to support ethical trading.
- encourage governments to be more self sufficient.
- boycott products and companies with unfair practices after thorough research.
- compile an international list of "unfair" companies.
- educate people about co-ops.
- buycotts!
- re-educate exploited workers for better jobs.

Evaluation

Conference participants and presenters agreed that the conference accomplished its goal of allowing a mixed group of young people to examine and exchange ideas about the ethics of international trade.

Initially, the conference was planned to be a three-day event that would include more actual policy work by the participants. Budget constraints made it necessary to cut the time frame, which gave less opportunity for policy development and eliminated such things as a conference newsletter. Even so, participant evaluations praised the conference structure and presentations, while presenters and facilitators praised the thoughtful analysis and contributions of the participants.

Suggested improvements were that there should be more exercises and group work and that the conference should be longer. Requests were made for a future conference on other aspects of foreign policy, perhaps including a facilitator/presenter from the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development.

"The speakers and facilitators for this conference were wonderful. They made it a discussion, not a lecture."

"The participants from the Coady Institute were an added bonus. Coming from them, the issues seem real, and they know first hand what they are talking about."

"I hope that I can take the knowledge that I have now back to my community and inform them on this very important issue."

"I think Bob Thomson's ideas and the fact that there is proof that something can be done will encourage us to get our foot in there and make a difference!"

Participant List

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